

Fearless Thinkers, Episode 5

"Elevate your gaze: countering uncertainty with an enterprise mindset"
with Ignacio Vaccaro, Head of Strategy Execution & Business Acumen
Center of Excellence in BTS Europe

Masami: Welcome to Fearless Thinkers, the BTS Podcast. My name is Masami Cookson, and our host is Rick Cheatham. Today, he is joined by Ignacio Vaccaro, who leads our Strategy Alignment and Implementation Center of Excellence for Europe.

Hey Rick. Can you give us a preview?

Rick: Sure, Masami. It was a great chat with Ignacio. We went a little down the road of the current business environment, and how it's become almost a cliché to say that it's unprecedented; and how difficult it is for people to have confidence in their decision-making as they used to, and also what tools are available for individuals and teams to have a little bit more confidence and to actually even build some business acumen capability so that they can be more successful in today's world.

Masami: Sounds great. Let's jump in.

Rick: Hey Ignacio, thanks so much for taking the time to chat with us today.

Ignacio: My pleasure, Rick. Really happy to be here.

Rick: So, I know in your role you get to work with many different types of clients. I'm curious what you're hearing today as being some of the top priorities or challenges.

Ignacio: That's right. I'm really fortunate that I get to see and hear lots of things, and what is coming through right now... It's a couple of things.

Right now, there's a lot of conversation around dealing with a huge amount of complexity and change coming through in different guises. We see a lot of instability in the world; we see a lot of challenges around things like supply chains. And a lot of inflationary pressure.

So, that filters through into the very, very short term, but also begins to impact the strategy process in the long term for our clients. So, quite an interesting time; quite a very

challenging time.

Rick: It sounds like it. Given all of the circumstances you just described, what does that turn into potentially for leaders within an organization. Do they prioritize different things than they usually do?

Ignacio: Yeah, it's quite an interesting question, because what we typically see is that it takes a lot more from leaders to be effective and efficient in organizations.

It takes both the knowledge of the business; it takes the knowing the nuts and bolts of the organization; how the whole enterprise value creation process works. But it takes, also, a behavioral component. It takes, you know, who they are as leaders, how they show up, how they infuse their teams.

It takes the ability to take on a huge amount of complexity and synthesize it into the right action, so the demands placed on leaders and therefore what organizations are focusing on is very broad, in terms of the technicalities (so, what people do), and increasingly, everything that's related to how they do it: how they deal with change, how they deal with transformation, how they [deal with a] very dynamic environment and flex their strategies accordingly.

Rick: Right. Being able to flex strategy and sort through all of the data that's coming at me and narrow that down to a to a quick set of "These are the best things to do right now" would be incredibly important skills to have.

And so, what's your best advice for clients that find themselves in these kinds of circumstances?

Ignacio: Well, with clients, where we typically been doing – particularly in the last 12 to 18 months – is to focus on experiences and programs that cut across a number of things. We need to focus on the fundamentals of the business – that's inescapable, that's what we've been doing, what we've been using to support organizations; but equally, we're focusing on things are more the behavioral side, on who they are as leaders. And so, we work with experiences that put leaders in an environment that recreates the pressures and the challenges

and the dynamics in their markets with their clients, so, all the complexity that comes through the market.

And we also do that in an environment that we can observe, and we can see who they are as leaders and how they are tackling those challenges. And we take that safe environment, and that's the perfect vehicle to identify the challenges and also coach old mindsets and help them evolve into a new ones.

We refer to these setups as Leader Labs, because it brings leaders into an environment that replicates the key challenges, facilitates observation and coaching, and can move them forward.

And these experiences typically show a reality that elevates their gaze, elevates them beyond the silo, which is one of the recurring challenges that we see: to adopt a much more enterprise-kind of thinking, enterprise mindset. Looking across the whole system, rather than the parts of the organization where you have specialized.

Rick:

So, let's dig in just a little bit deeper, if you don't mind.

It's almost cliché at this point when... To hear people say things like: "It's not only what you do, but it's also how you do it." I think, in these types of engagements that you're talking about, we often say we "catch people in the act of being themselves." Could you give me just the next level of detail on how something like that works?

Ignacio:

Yeah absolutely, and you're right, you know... It's sad to be cliché when we say you know "how you do things." But it's actually quite real; it's actually quite interesting to see how, sometimes, the strategic intent of what leaders do goes in one direction; and perhaps who they are – and the behavior they are displaying – goes in a different one.

So, if the coach is, to give you an example, for organizations to work more collaboratively because there's a strategic imperative to say, "Work better on a global scale; pull resources and expertise from different parts of the organization – perhaps pockets of excellence that need to be now used across the entire company," and you match

that with a mindset that is not very collaborative. A mindset that doesn't really play to that idea, or behaviors that are much more about defending a specific part or a small kingdom within the organization.

You can see how those two things don't go together, so what we try and do is to identify the situations in which that comes through, showing in a very context-rich environment, where we can say: "This is the mindset, and this is what perhaps is stopping us from realizing our full potential." And once we've identified that mindset that limitation, that behavior, we can address it, we can help leaders move and evolve it. And that's the key of the "What you do and how you do it," to make sure that there's consistency, and that the behaviors correspond with a strategic imperative that you trying to play to.

Rick: Great! Thanks for that. And You've used a word now a few times, or a phrase, around mindset and building mindset.

Help me a little bit with how we are impacting – or how we are shifting – mindset.

Ignacio: Yeah, it's a good observation, Rick, because mindset really is the way you see the world, the attitudes you bring to your life to work to your organization, and that's ultimately what sits underneath observable behavior. So, it's going to condition the way you behave and the things you do, and the way you react, and the way you act around others.

So, having that mindset is about identifying, you know, how you see the world – what is your perception of – what is your position of your role within the organization, and making sure that we provide the tools for people, for leaders, to understand how that mindset is affecting the way they're getting things done, so they have the confidence, and come in equipped with the right mindset, to support the their strategy and to support the execution.

Rick: Cool! And, I guess, one of the things that I can't help but do is go all the way back to the beginning of our conversation: past patterns allowed us to at least have an idea of where to go

next. That security seems to be gone for so many people in their organizations.

So, given the pressure to perform short term, obviously, makes it very difficult for folks to say, "The best answer for me is to take all my leaders and focus them on development and practice," versus leaving these people in their chairs and getting them to get today's work done.

How would you respond to that, or how can you help make sense of that?

Ignacio:

Yeah, and it is something that we would have heard from many of our clients and in lots of conversations that we have. The way I typically speak to clients about this is... We recognize that there's a lot of decisions that need to happen in the short term, this is just the world we live in. It's moving really fast.

I like the way you put it, in that we don't have that comfort that perhaps would have had before, in terms of relying on what we've done before, relying on experience. You need to be so quick on your feet right now to drive a strategy; to run a business.

And we need to reconcile that with the longer-term picture for any organization. These organizations obviously need to the over the short term; need to meet those challenges. But at the same time, they need to deliver long term value, and it's about reconciling the two.

It's about understanding what are the big bets that we need to do today and the trade-offs and the decisions that we need to make right now to make sure that we cut through the challenges of today... The capabilities that you bring, the challenges in the industry and the wider ecosystem.

The beauty of what we do is that, all of those ingredients, we can model them. We can model them and build them into our simulations as a platform to explore those challenges, and give leaders an opportunity to see that action and reaction and experience the potential outcomes of those decisions.

So, what we do becomes particularly powerful, because we can model those situations. We can engineer them to trigger the right discussion – the most valuable discussions – and drive the most important learnings and actionable insights for leaders to start taking those lessons, and begin to apply them back into that businesses.

Rick: Fantastic. Well, hey, I really appreciate again you taking the time to share with us what you're hearing and seeing and potentially what we could do about it so thanks.

Ignacio: Thank you, Rick.

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